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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGKOK 006106

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: THAILAND SUPPORTS EARLY RATIFICATION OF ASEAN
CHARTER

REF: STATE 164897

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In response to reftel demarche, an MFA ASEAN Department official argued in favor of the quick ratification of the Charter. Deputy Director General Manasvri reasoned that it was better to have Burma be a party to a binding agreement, and look for ways to use the mechanisms of the Charter to promote progress there. However, he could not say just how the new Charter could be used to pressure or influence Burma. Manasvri indicated that the Thai were relying on incoming ASEAN SecGen Surin Pitsuwan to make ASEAN more effective on this issue. He said that the Thai were considering new ideas for dealing with Burma, such as allowing the ASEAN SecGen to play a greater role in the ARF. The MFA will submit the Charter to the new parliament early next year; this might turn into a venue for further discussion of the Burma problem. END SUMMARY

SELF-DEFEATING

¶2. (C) Polcouns made reftel points to Deputy Director General Manasvri Srisodopol of the MFA ASEAN Department on December ¶12. (Ambassador was unable to make the points to the Foreign Minister or MFA Permsec, who were out of the country.) DDG Manasvri argued that delaying the ratification of the Charter to pressure Burma was "self-defeating." He said that, if ASEAN does not permit the Charter to come into force, then "it cannot use the mechanisms of the Charter" to pressure Burma. He admitted that ASEAN had had limited success in influencing Burma, and that it was not yet clear how the mechanisms in the new Charter would work. He nonetheless maintained that it would be better to have Burma be a party to a binding agreement with the other ASEAN countries.

¶3. (C) DDG Manasvri said that much would depend on the new ASEAN Secretary-General, (former Thai foreign minister) Surin Pitsuwan. The MFA anticipated that SecGen Surin would be very active; in fact, Manasvri said, the MFA might have to set up a unit within the ministry to support Surin's initiatives. He said it was not a case of Thailand influencing the new SecGen (which would be improper), but rather of Surin exerting influence on Thailand, due to his connections and status.

¶4. (C) Polcouns emphasized that we were open to discussion

with ASEAN and would welcome their thoughts on further steps ASEAN and the international community could take to promote progress in Burma. We noted that ASEAN seemed inclined to reject the proposals put forward by other countries, but had been slow itself to suggest other options. Manasvri said that Thailand was thinking about and proposing options. For example, at the recent ARF meeting in Brunei, Thailand had proposed a more active role for the ASEAN SecGen in following up on ARF initiatives. They considered that the SecGen might be able, for example, to convene a "Friends of the Chair" group including ASEAN and other ARF members to address significant issues -- this might be a useful venue for further discussion of Burma.

RATIFICATION

15. (C) In response to our questions, Manasvri outlined the ratification process. The MFA will not submit the Charter to the current interim legislature for ratification. Rather, the Treaties Department will prepare enabling legislation which will be submitted to the new parliament for approval, once it is in place. (The new parliament should be seated within a month after the December 23 election.) Manasvri agreed that there might be extensive discussion and debate in the new parliament over the Charter in general and Burma in particular, but made no specific predictions.

16. (C) COMMENT: Depending on the composition of the new parliament, this may be the venue for some serious discussion about Burma's relations with ASEAN and the new Charter. We can look for opportunities to stimulate such a discussion. The MFA appears firmly committed to the view that it is

BANGKOK 00006106 002 OF 002

better to have Burma enmeshed in a relationship with ASEAN, even though they cannot yet articulate just how this will help. We do not anticipate the current government changing its support for the quick ratification of the Charter. We will be prepared to raise these and other suggestions on Burma as soon as possible with the new government, once it takes office early next year.

BOYCE